

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3085

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 6386

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IS

SUBJECT: MAPAM RETAINS ITS OPTIONS

1. A RECENT ITEM IN DAVAR (HISTADRUT) REPORTED THAT THE MAPAM PARTY SECRETARIAT IS PROCEEDING WITH PREPARATIONS FOR AN INDEPENDENT ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THE STORY NOTED THAT PARTY LEADERS HAVE DECIDED TO SET UP ORGANIZATION AND INFORMATION COMMITTEES FOR THAT PURPOSE. IN A CONVERSATION WITH JOSI BEN-BASAT, FORMER SPOKESMAN FOR MAPAM AND CURRENTLY ADVISOR TO MAPAM'S KNESSET FACTION, HE CONFIRMED THE REPORT OF HIS PARTY'S PREPARATIONS TO RUN ON A SEPARATE LIST, IF THE DECISION SHOULD BE MADE TO DO SO. HE SAID THE PARTY IS MOVING TO MAINTAIN THE OPTION OF RUNNING SEPARATELY AS LONG AS THE SITUATION IN THE LABOR PARTY REMAINS UNCLEAR. HE SAID THAT THE LABOR PARTY SHOWS NO SIGN OF ADOPTING AN EXPLICIT STAND ON NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE ARABS, A SUBJECT WHICH IS OF OVERRIDING IMPORTANCE TO MAPAM IN DECIDING WHETHER TO REMAIN IN THE ALIGNMENT. THE LABOR PARTY, HE ADDED, IS "IN CHAOS," WITH RABIN, PERES, RABINOWITZ, ETC., EACH GOING HIS OWN WAY. HOUSING MINISTER OFER HAS BEGUN WORKING THE HUSTINGS TO SHAPE UP THE LABOR PARTY AND BEN-BASAT THOUGHT THAT HE WILL ACCOMPLISH MUCH, CONFIDENTIAL

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BUT HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO GALVANIZE THE PARTY SINGLE-HANDEDLY.

2. IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF MAPAM (INCLUDING BEN-BASAT) ARE INSISTING THAT THE ALIGNMENT MUST PRESENT A DEFINITE PEACE PLAN TO THE VOTERS NEXT YEAR SO THAT THE ELECTORATE CAN CHOOSE BETWEEN THE ALIGNMENT AND ITS PLAN AND THE LIKUD, WHICH WOULD CERTAINLY OPPOSE THE PLAN AND MIGHT HAVE ITS OWN PROGRAM FOR SETTLEMENT OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE TO OFFER THE VOTERS. HE SAID THAT MAPAM IS RESTIVE WITH THE LABOR PARTY'S POLICY OF SITTING TIGHT AND REFUSING TO MAKE NEEDED DECISIONS ON THIS SUBJECT AND ON OTHER MATTERS, SUCH AS QADOUM. MAPAM THINKS IT A MISTAKE TO ALLOW THE CURRENT SITUATION TO PASS WITHOUT TAKING THE INITIATIVE ON PEACE. THE AMERICAN ELECTION NOTWITHSTANDING, ISRAEL CANNOT AFFORD TO LET TIME SLIP BY.

3. BEN-BASAT THOUGHT THAT MAPAM IS PRESENTLY ABOUT EVENLY DIVIDED OVER WHETHER TO REMAIN IN THE ALIGNMENT, WITH ABOUT 40 PERCENT FAVORING LEAVING, 40 PERCENT PREFERRING TO REMAIN AND 20 PERCENT AWAITING DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE DECIDING. THIS 20 PERCENT "BALANCING" SECTOR INCLUDES GENERAL SECRETARY TALMI, HEALTH MINISTER SHEMTOV AND MK DOV ZAKIN. PARENTHETICALLY, BEN-BASAT SAID THAT WERE HE STILL THE PARTY'S SPOKESMAN, HE WOULD NOT BE SO FRANK BUT WOULD INSTEAD GLOSS OVER THE INTERNAL DIVISIONS.

4. BEN-BASAT SAID THAT IF THE SITUATION DOES NOT CHANGE, THE LABOR PARTY STANDS TO LOSE SEVERAL SEATS AND THE LIKUD WILL GAIN A FEW. THIS COULD RESULT IN A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY, A SITUATION THAT BEN-BASAT CONSIDERED WORSE THAN A LIKUD-RUN GOVERNMENT. A LIKUD GOVERNMENT WITH BEGIN AS PRIME MINISTER WOULD NOT LAST A MONTH BECAUSE THE HISTADRUT, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD REFUSE TO COOPERATE WITH HIM AND HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD FALL. BUT AS PARTNERS IN A NATIONAL UNITY COALITION, THE LIKUD WOULD EXERCISE A VETO OVER COMPROMISES NECESSARY FOR PEACE. SUCH A GOVERNMENT, AS WAS DEMONSTRATED IN 1967-70, WOULD BE HAWKISH AND WOULD, FURTHERMORE, HAVE LITTLE TROUBLE REMAINING IN POWER. BEN-BASAT IMPLIED THAT THE ONLY WAY TO PRECLUDE THIS EVENTUALITY WAS FOR THE LABOR PARTY TO PUT ITS HOUSE IN ORDER AND PRESENT A SPECIFIC PROGRAM CONTAINING THE PROMISE OF PEACE.

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5. COMMENT: AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, MAPAM IS VERY MUCH THE JUNIOR PARTNER IN THE ALIGNMENT. IT IS A DOCTRINAIRE SOCIALIST PARTY WHOSE MEMBERSHIP DERIVES FROM ITS KIBBUTZ MOVEMENT AND FROM AMONG HARDCORE TRADE UNIONISTS. IT HAS ONLY LIMITED MASS APPEAL AND ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE ARABS IS DEFINITELY A MINORITY VIEW.
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